



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Rural Development

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JUNE 2006 IS NATIONAL HOMEOWNERSHIP MONTH

Editorial by Rural Development Under Secretary Thomas C. Dorr

On May 24th, [President Bush issued a proclamation](#) designating the month of June, 2006 as Homeownership Month. The proclamation underscores the Administration's commitment to providing more Americans with safe, affordable homes.

USDA Rural Development is proud to play a significant role in that effort. In his proclamation the President noted that nearly 70 percent of all Americans now enjoy the satisfaction of owning their own homes. Additionally, since 2002, when the President announced a goal of helping 5.5 million members of minority groups become homeowners by the end of the decade, the rate of minority homeownership has climbed above 50 percent. Owning a home is the one best way to create financial stability and economic wellbeing. It helps promote stable, happy families, a sense of "place" and we're proud that Rural Development has assisted almost 250,000 Americans achieve their homeownership dream since the start of the Bush Administration.

Each one of those quarter-million homeowners has an individual story to tell. In Georgia, a Hispanic mother and her four year old child moved out of a shelter for battered women and into a beautiful three bedroom two bath home in a rural community. In Kansas, a husband, wife and two children ages 3 and 5 moved out of a converted school bus and into a modern home. A Kentucky woman, after closing on her home with Rural Development's help said "I never dreamed I could own my own home. It feels good to say it's all mine. The house is everything I wanted. The night I moved in, I just wanted to cry because I was so happy."

We make homeownership dreams a reality. We've been doing it every day since our agency was established over 70 years ago and to do it we offer a variety of quality programs.

In 1935, when we started, the challenge was the Depression. Today, the challenge is finding innovative ways to place families in the housing they need with payments they can afford. We're doing it creatively, with a program that ["guarantees" loans](#) made by financial institutions and with [programs requiring no down payments](#), subsidized mortgage interest rates of as little as 1 percent depending on income levels.

And since 1961, we're doing it with popular programs like "Self Help Housing" where groups of 10 to 12 families, under the direction of non-profit organizations that receive funding through Rural Development, have been working together to build their own homes. It usually takes a family at least a year from the start of the process, because they have to do at least 65 percent of the work themselves and no participating family can move into a home until all of the homes are finished. When they're done, their labor becomes their "sweat equity". This year, the

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program passed an important milestone: The total number of loans made through the Self Help program topped 40,000, and the total dollar amount of mortgages made under the program topped \$2 billion. Over the 45 years the program has been in existence, the equivalent of a medium-sized rural community has been constructed by families working together to build their own homes.

We're also proud to be of assistance to the victims of the hurricanes that devastated the gulf coast in 2005. We placed about 10,000 hurricane evacuees in Rural Development financed housing, helped FEMA answer about 73,000 calls for assistance, and now we're helping in the rebuilding effort with nearly \$1.5 billion in loans, guarantees and grants. Recently we announced a program to help qualified Rural Development funded homeowners who are behind on their mortgage payments because of last year's hurricanes.

From 2001 to the present, the Bush Administration, through Rural Development alone, has invested over \$23 billion in America's housing stock. That includes about \$2 billion so far this year. We're helping Americans in all walks of life achieve their dream of homeownership, and we'd like to help you, too. Our motto for homeownership month is "Own your future". To find out more about our home loan programs, call your local Rural Development office. We have locations in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. At USDA Rural Development, we're committed to the future of rural communities.

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